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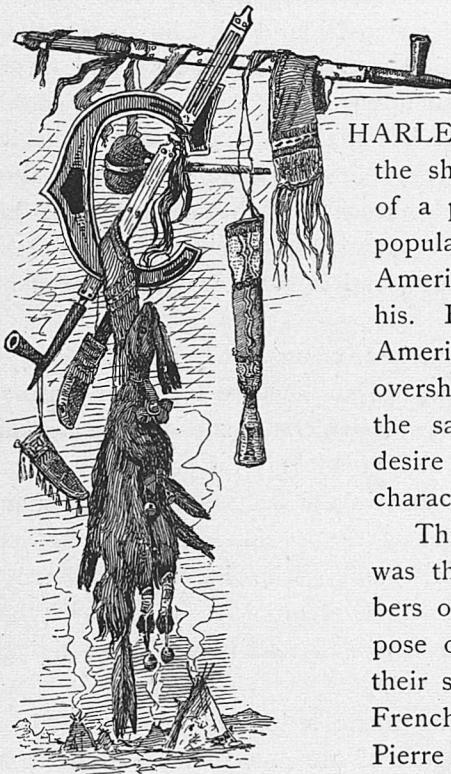
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DRAWN BY W. S. EAMES.—FROM SKETCHES BY C. F. WIMAR.

CHARLES FERDINAND WIMAR.



DESIGNED BY H. CHASE.

FROM SKETCHES BY C. F. WIMAR.

HARLES FERDINAND WIMAR—or Carl Wimar, according to the shorter form which he himself preferred to use—is the name of a painter whose biography will not be found in any of the popular works relating to artists; yet the productions of few American painters possess so great an ethnological interest as his. Born near Bonn, in Germany, Feb. 20th, 1829, he came to America at the age of fifteen. The artistic element in his nature overshadowed all others, and when he was brought in contact with the savages of the New World, he became absorbed with the desire to devote himself to the delineation of Indian life and character.

Thirty-six years ago St. Louis was a frontier town, and, as it was the head-quarters of the American Fur Company, large numbers of Indians made annual pilgrimages to the place for the purpose of exchanging furs for such commodities as were needed in their savage life. Their dealings were almost exclusively with the French, who settled upon the spot, selected as a trading-post by Pierre Laclede Liguest, in 1704.

There was no antagonism between the French and Indians. I say the French, for although Americans by birth and an ancestry extending back through succeeding generations for more than a

century, they still retained the language, traditions, and customs of the original settlers. It was no uncommon thing for a Frenchman to have an Indian wife, and in some cases he would conform to the usages of both civilized and savage races by having a white wife in St. Louis and a dusky one among the tribes of the Far West.

In 1844 Wimar's step-father and mother settled in St. Louis, and located on the outskirts of the town, near the favorite camping-ground of the Indians. The shy German lad soon became a favorite with them. One warrior of noble presence took an especial fancy to the boy. He went with him into the woods, and taught him the use of Indian weapons. The Indian was pleased with the enthusiasm of the youth and his unaffected delight in whatever he saw, while to the young German all was new and strange. The growing, bustling Western city, with its population of restless frontiersmen, the mild and equable climate and months of almost uninterrupted sunshine, the sense of freedom experienced in the virgin forests and on the far-reaching

flower-decked prairies, was, to one fresh from the drowsy, commonplace life characteristic of a German village, the consummation of happiness. A strange companionship was this between the stoical savage and the timid boy from the Old World. The Indian was always welcome at Wimar's home, where he would go without ceremony, open the door softly, and glide noiselessly into the family room, and startle them into a knowledge of his presence by the salutation, "How?" Of what inestimable value to the future artist was this intimate association with the Indians at the age when his mind was so susceptible to lasting impressions! His association with the savages was not the result of idle curiosity merely, but was devoted to close and intelligent study of their half-nude forms and picturesque costumes. From early childhood he manifested a natural aptitude for drawing, and at school oftener employed his slate and pencil in caricaturing the master than in doing the assigned tasks in mathematics; so that when he came to America he had already acquired considerable facility in the use of the pencil.

But his parents were poor, and it was necessary that he should become a producer as well as a consumer. It was decided that he should learn a trade, and when consulted as to his preference he at once expressed a desire to become a painter. His step-father took him to the shop of a house and steamboat painter, but the boy had in his mind a certain ornamental and fresco designer as approaching more nearly his ideal. He was taken upon trial, and soon surprised his master with the development of a talent undreamed of. He became a workman of rare skill, not fettered by conventional forms, but with an imagination capable of originating designs altogether surprising to his fellows. He was always prompt and cheerful in the discharge of his duties, at all times industrious and reliable, excepting on the occasion of the arrival of a fresh band of Indians, when the old passion would come over him, and in utter forgetfulness of all else he would seek companionship with the red men.

While Wimar was yet a boy, a Polander, exiled and homeless, came to St. Louis, foot-sore and weary. Chance brought him to the home of the young painter, where the poor German family cheerfully offered him such hospitality as their scanty means could afford. He became greatly attached to young Wimar, and listened with approval to his plans for some day reaching a point where he would be able to return to fatherland, and in the art schools of Germany receive such instruction as was required to follow intelligently the profession which he had chosen from childhood. Some years afterward, when the Polander, who had accumulated a modest sum of money, was stricken with fatal illness, his mind reverted to those who had befriended him in his hour of need, and to the boy painter who had told him of his longings, and he dictated a will leaving to the latter all that he possessed.

In 1849, before this money was bequeathed to him, Wimar made a journey to the Falls of St. Anthony with his employer, to make studies for a panorama of the principal points of interest on the Mississippi River from that point to its confluence with the Ohio. The tribes of Indians met by them near the Falls of St. Anthony afforded him fine opportunities for study. Soon after his return the way was unexpectedly opened for him, as just related, to realize what had heretofore been scarcely a cherished hope, and he joyfully set out for Düsseldorf. He remained abroad five years, applying himself with the enthusiasm of one for whom art was not merely a profession, a means of livelihood, but a sacred shrine, at which he worshipped with the profound devotion of a neophyte. He became a pupil of Leutze, with whom he remained during the time of his stay at Düsseldorf.

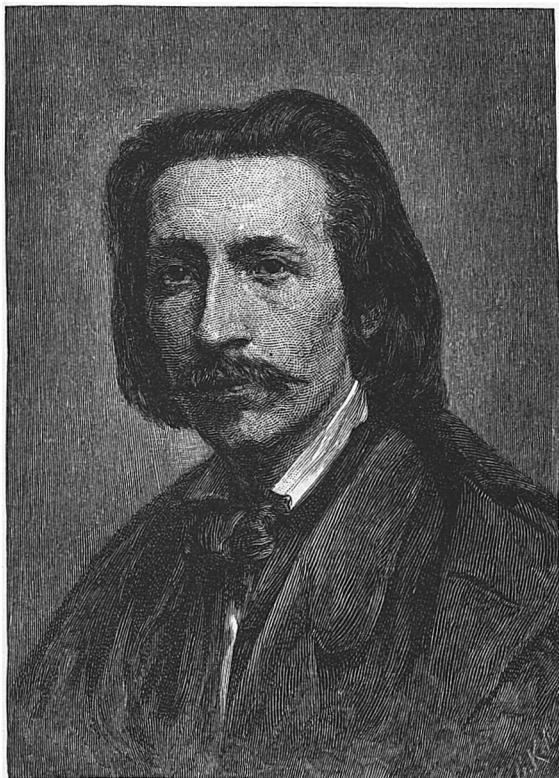
While there several of his most important works were executed. Among these was *The Captive Charger*, now the property of Mr. S. M. Dodd of St. Louis. This I regard as the best of all his works. It is a powerful composition, illustrative of the war of extermination between the races, without the revolting details which by their presence would not add to the force with which the story is told, but cause one to shudder at the unnecessary portrayal of human ferocity. A small party of Indians have killed an army officer, who had doubtless ventured too far from camp, and are hurrying away with his horse and accoutrements. The eye of the finely

modelled charger shows by its angry glare that he realizes the fate of his master and the character of those into whose hands he has fallen. The cowardly savages know the dire vengeance which will swiftly follow the discovery of their crime, and, as they make their way through the prairie grass, they look eagerly around for signs of the dreaded enemy. A gorgeous sunset fills the western sky with gold dust, and tints the clouds with crimson. The swarthy forms of the savages are edged with sun-rays reflected from sky and cloud. The glory of the heavens diverts the attention in a measure from the hideous story of hate, the conflict between savagery and civilization, begun with the advent of the white man upon the Atlantic coast, and which will end only when the last red man is wounded unto death by the exterminator of his race. *The Buffalo Hunt* was painted about the same time, and, while it is perhaps more complete as a composition and more spirited in action, it is somewhat strained in the manifest effort to accomplish something which was just beyond the artist's power to reach. In 1859 the Prince of Wales visited St. Louis. He was accompanied by the Duke of Newcastle, who saw this picture and ordered a *replica* of it, which was in due time finished and forwarded to him.

On Wimar's return to America he found that wonderful changes had been wrought in his absence. The visits of the Indians had almost ceased, as they had been forced upon reservations in the Far West, and agencies established to care for them. His small capital had been nearly exhausted, and he felt the chilling influence of an atmosphere entirely devoid of art sympathy. Still he was as enthusiastic and as completely absorbed in his favorite theme as ever. The American Fur Company had a chain of forts on the Upper Missouri River, and during each season one or more steamboats were sent to the mountains, as it was called, to convey government stores to the Indian reservations, and bring in return furs obtained from trappers and Indians. On these steamers Wimar was enabled to penetrate to the heart of the hostile Indian country, where he spent three seasons in the arduous and dangerous task of studying the savages. He provided himself with a photographic apparatus, and in addition to the great number of studies made in oil, crayon, and pencil he secured a quantity of photographic memoranda which were invaluable to him.

The difficulties experienced by him are best described in his own language. "During the month of May," he writes to a friend, "I commenced my tour to the Indian country, accompanied by the United States Indian Agent, Col. Vaughn, but was informed when we arrived at Sioux City, that I had chosen rather a dangerous companion, as considerable hostility existed between that officer of the government and many of the most warlike tribes. Taking this matter well into consideration, and after consulting with my travelling companion, Capt. Blandowsky, it was considered as better policy to join ourselves to the American Fur Company, who were in better odor among the nations. This accordingly we did, but were not as much benefited by the change as we anticipated, for the agent still pressed himself upon us."

"The Indians whom we first encountered were the Janktomes, who were encamped, about three hundred strong, on the Missouri River. The spectacle presented by them was very impos-



C. F. WIMAR.

ENGRAVED BY G. KRUELL.—FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.

ing, and as we neared them they came to the shore and paraded before us, dressed in the most gaudy style, but were seized with the utmost panic when our steam organ (*Calliope*) began its music, and only after its melodies had died away in the distance did they appear to become quiet. You may rest assured that I lost no time in arranging my photographic apparatus, and was enabled, in the short time allowed me, to take several groups. Their chiefs then came aboard and formed a council to treat with the agent. The debate, however, was quite protracted and stormy, and ended in the refusal of the tribe to accept the usual presents proffered them by the government. We were rejoiced to depart without serious misfortune, for we feared much trouble; the agent also participating in our surmises to such a degree, and being aware of the fact that the Indians higher up the river were still more savage and uncompromising than those we had just visited, thought it advisable at Fort Randell to take on board a company of soldiers for our protection. At this point, which is about one hundred and thirty miles above St. Louis, the Ponkas and Brulees came aboard and accepted their presents quietly, on account of the presence of the soldiers (long-knives). . . . The next station of any import was Fort Pierre,

where we found several hundred warriors of the Sioux, with their women and children; we were, however, unable to land at this point, on account of the low stage of water, and we therefore ascended one mile further up the stream, followed by the Indians in procession. The chiefs formed themselves in a circle on the shore opposite the boat, their women and children being arranged behind them. After some deliberation the greater of their warriors came aboard to confer with the agent, but complained of the military, as thereby their suspicious natures were aroused. Of these savages I obtained as many portraits as possible, unseen by them, and also was enabled to catch several groups; of these latter, however, the figures were rather too small on account of the distance at which I was obliged to stand while taking them. During these stoppages my extra time was occupied in trading, and, as before starting on my journey I had supplied myself with many little notions for this purpose, I was enabled to procure a variety of curiosities, costumes, arms, and accoutrements. In the afternoon we continued our course, and on the second

BEAR RIB.¹

DRAWN BY H. CHASE.—FROM AN OIL STUDY BY C. F. WIMAR.

day thereafter we were spoken by some Indians, and according to the duty of the agent were obliged to land. We had scarcely reached the shore when some three hundred savages galloped towards us in a furious manner until they were within about one hundred paces of our party, when they suddenly came to a halt and fired their flint-locks over our heads. You may imagine our fright when we heard the whistling balls passing over us, but we were informed that such proceedings were intended as a sign of friendship. Some of their pieces had been aimed so low that their bullets took effect on the wheel-house of our steamer. The Indians then descended from their highly caparisoned horses and there was a great council formed on the prairie. The appearance of these warriors was so savage that I was actually afraid to attempt the drawing of any of them."

In the continuation of their journey the party met with many exciting adventures, and at last arrived at Fort Union, which is within seven miles of the mouth of the Yellowstone. Wimar continues his letter as follows:—"We were now 2,500 miles from St. Louis, which we had travelled in about thirty-one days. Here we were visited by several bands of the Assinaboines, who regularly receive an annual present from the government. Our boat then visited the site of a

¹ All the illustrations accompanying this article were made from sketches, etc. in the possession of the widow of the artist, now Mrs. Charles Schleiffarth, of St. Louis.

new fort some eighty miles further up, and then commenced the return trip. My companions and myself remained for a short time at Fort Union, making the necessary preparations for a journey farther up the Yellowstone. Navigation is here impossible by steamboat, and we were obliged to build special craft, which were drawn along by men. You may easily imagine the labor that we were compelled to undergo when I inform you that it was often necessary for us all to exert ourselves together to move the boats, the whole shore being so thickly covered with underwood and brushwood that it is almost impassable for men, much less so for horses: at the same time, to add to our inconvenience, it was very cold and very rainy. There were fifty-three men in our little band, and we had in our keeping, besides our own necessary outfit, the goods of the Fur Company and those of the agent designed for Fort Sarpie, which lies about three hundred miles up the Yellowstone. This distance we accomplished in about sixty days. During this time our principal food consisted of buffalo meat, and we consumed during the period about sixty-four of these animals. Each of the party cut from the carcass that portion of the meat which best suited his palate and prepared it for his own use. We cooked without seasoning, and nothing could have been more palatable.

"Notwithstanding all the hardships which we endured, this was the most interesting portion of our travels. Herds of buffalo frequently swam the river in front of our boat, crossing often so near that many times we entertained great fears for her safety. During the night we had a regular watch to alarm us in case of danger from Indians, and lighted large fires around our camp to scare away the bears and the wolves which were ever on the scent. Near Fort Sarpie we found a very powerful tribe of Crow Indians; these we visited, remaining with them a short time, and then returned down the river in a boat constructed from buffalo hides, to Fort Union, where we took our oar-boat and descended still lower. As there were but eight of us in the return party, we had to take our regular duty at the oars, often travelling only at night, and accomplishing the journey in forty-two days. I finally arrived safely in St. Louis after an absence of nearly six months in the Indian country."

After Wimar had made a couple of these excursions, the savages learned that he was no sorcerer, and began to look for him on the first boat of the season. The squaws made gaudy head-dresses, tobacco-pouches, and such curious articles as they knew he delighted in possessing. He was so gentle in his ways that these implacable haters of the white man actually learned to like him, and when at last a steamer arrived with the intelligence that he was dead, there was sincere mourning among those who were wont to rejoice at the death of a pale-face. Carl Wimar died of consumption, at St. Louis, on Nov. 28th, 1863.

His studio was a perfect museum of Indian curiosities, and at the time of his death he possessed what was then probably the best collection of weapons, implements, and costumes in the country. Although of pure German blood, he had many of the physical characteristics of an Indian,—prominent cheek-bones, small eyes, and the pigeon-toed shambling gait of a savage. In his Indian costume, which he often wore, he would, when tanned by exposure, easily have been mistaken for a red man. In fact, I have been told by a German who saw him daily for years, that almost to the last he supposed him to be at least a half-breed. But here the resemblance stopped. In character he was shy and reserved, and there is something marvellous in the loving remembrance in which he is held by those to whom he made himself known.

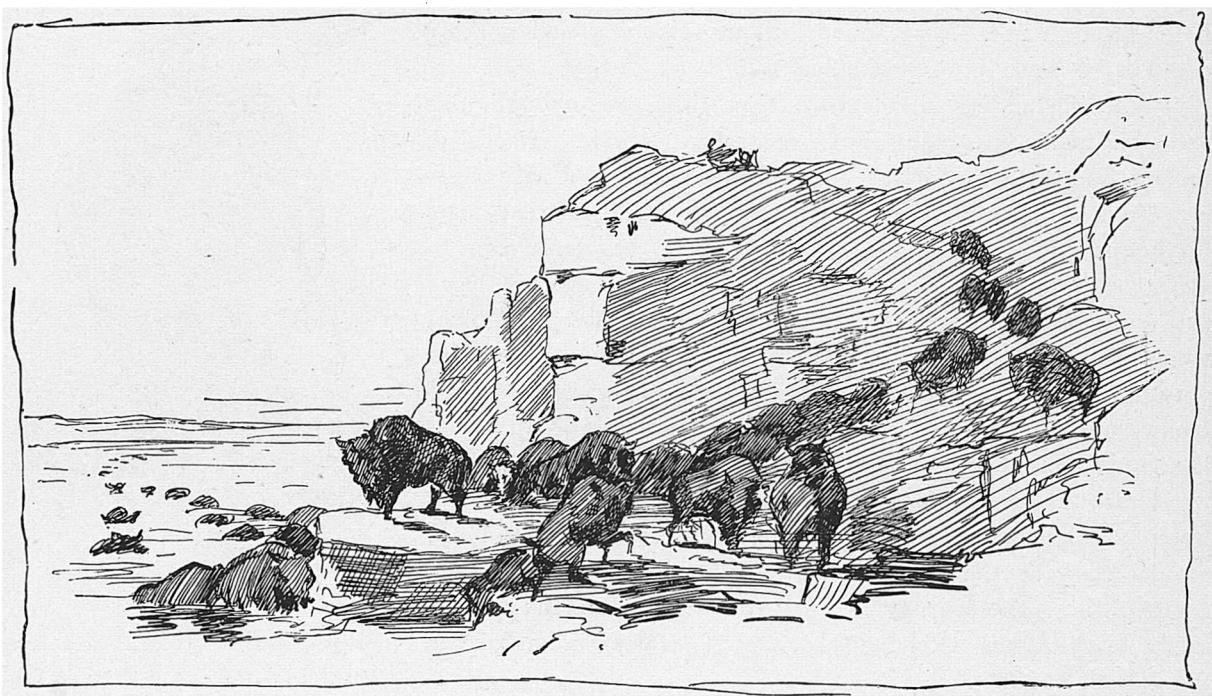


IRON HORN.

DRAWN BY H. CHASE.—FROM AN OIL
STUDY BY C. F. WIMAR.

I recall now three men, with heads frosted by time, whose eyes glistened with tears, when, as I led them to speak of Carl and their association with him, they came to his pitiful struggles, his solicitude for his mother, his gentleness and truth, his longing to live so as to complete worthily what he had begun,—and this seventeen years after his death.

When the rebellion came, for a time it seemed doubtful which way the scale would turn, whether to the side of the Union or to that of Secession. As a consequence nearly all business except that relating to war was suspended. In those exciting times people had no thought of pictures. But when it became apparent that St. Louis was to be held by the Federal government, confidence was in a measure restored, and money began to circulate. Wimar's faithful characterizations of the Indian attracted attention, and he began to receive commissions, and when it became manifest that consumption had fastened itself upon him, people were more than ever anxious for his works. He had always been desirous, first, of buying a home for his mother, and, second, of securing a sufficient sum of money to place himself above the reach of



BUFFALOES CROSSING A STREAM.

DRAWN BY H. CHASE.—FROM A SKETCH BY C. F. WIMAR.

possible want. Toward the last he was importuned to finish his orders, and money was almost thrust upon him. One day he said to his mother, with a sad smile: "Mother, if I last long enough I shall be so rich that I can have a bank account." At present his works are gaining in appreciation, and it is understood that several of his most important pictures will be presented to the Museum of the St. Louis School of Fine Arts when the building is completed.

The fate of the warrior who was Wimar's friend and companion in boyhood was so tragic, that I cannot withhold the story. Some enterprising Yankee conceived the idea of taking a number of Indians to England for exhibition. Among those who were induced to go was John, as he was familiarly called by the whites. These children of the forest knew nothing of the perils of the ocean. When on shipboard, John looked with supreme contempt upon the distressing evidences of sea-sickness among the passengers. At last a horrible suspicion entered the mind of the stoical savage. It was strengthened by every lunge of the steamer. He had faced death in many forms, but here was a danger more terrible than any. He waited until satisfied that there was but one way of escape from the humiliation, and then plunged a knife into his heart.



C. F. WIMAR, PINX.

H. CHASE, DEL.

DEFIANCE.

The Original in the Possession of Mrs. Charles Schleffarth.

In one of his essays Emerson says: "All departments of life at the present day—Trade, Politics, Letters, Science, or Religion—seem to feel, and to labor to express, the identity of their law. They are rays of one sun; they translate each into a new language the sense of the other. They are sublime when seen as emanations of a Necessity contradistinguished from the vulgar Fate, by being instant and alive, and dissolving man, as well as his works, in its flowing beneficence. This influence is conspicuously visible in the principles and history of Art." The works of Wimar were the result of such an all-controlling impulse. He seemed bound by the law of necessity to one line of action, and that was the study of the North American Indian and the delineation of his characteristics as shown in war, the chase, the council, in the observance of his superstitious rites, and in all the relations of life. I doubt if he ever willingly painted any other subject. He worked with the most conscientious fidelity. He made almost innumerable careful and detailed studies in color of the costume, weapons, implements, and trappings of the Indians. He studied the buffalo with the precision of a naturalist. He realized that the history of the Indian race, from the discovery of the continent, was closely interwoven with our own; that by the unvarying law of progress in a few years the savage must assimilate with the whites, change his mode of life, and become civilized, or be exterminated; that the great opportunity of leaving to future ages correct representations of the race in its native state must be speedily improved or be forever lost. He saw how rich in historical incident, how pregnant with pictorial interest, was the subject he had chosen. He saw that no American painter seemed to have fully realized what immense importance would soon attach to works of this character; that, in all its elements, the entire history of the Indian was a tragedy; that his legends were filled with poetical tenderness and beauty.

What Wimar accomplished was, however, but a forecast of the future. He died upon the threshold of his career. His work shows the influence of false teaching, of crude and unsympathetic surroundings, of the heart-ache and blight of poverty; but it also shows that, if under such adverse circumstances he succeeded so well, great things would have been forthcoming, had the sunshine of prosperity ripened the fruit of his genius.

Where is the American painter to take up this almost forgotten theme? There are young Americans fresh from the best art schools of Europe, possessing technical knowledge, breadth of manner, and mastery of color, to a degree unapproached by the earlier painters, who are striving for fame and fortune in the hard and stony highways worn bare by the footsteps of the throng gone before them. Who will be first to turn aside into this new path, where full fruition lies?

W. R. HODGES.

